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RECEPTION OF NEW AMBASSADOR

## NEW CZECH ENVOY OFFERS HELP IN AGRI, DEFENSE NEEDS

By **Jerome Aning**  
@JeromeAningINQ

President Marcos has secured a commitment from the Czech government for assistance to Philippine agriculture and defense and security needs, Malacañang said on Wednesday.

New Czech Ambassador Karel Hejč, who presented his credentials to Mr. Marcos on Tuesday, said visits to the Philippines by high-ranking Czech

government officials and business delegation are being organized for possible partnerships on defense, agriculture and other areas.

"The opportunities are here. We just need to grab them and I'm pleased to mention that just in the next year, we will start here with the visit of the foreign committee of our parliament on so much important defense and security issues of the regional geopolitics," the

Presidential Communications Office, in a statement, quoted Hejč telling Mr. Marcos.

"But later on in the year, we plan on bringing our minister of agriculture to Manila and to the Philippines [along with] business delegations. So, carefully selected companies that are interested in doing business with the Philippines, with the Filipino companies, and investing in Philippines."

The President told the Czech

envoy that his administration is prioritizing agriculture along with other areas to transform the Philippine economy.

### Geopolitical situations

Defense and security are also major thrusts for the administration, Mr. Marcos added, considering the geopolitical situations that the country is facing.

"Your country has already been of assistance to us in

proposing some vessels that we could use for the securing of our maritime waters, our maritime territory. And as you must know that this is becoming a very thorny problem that we are facing," the President said.

"Not only the Philippines, but I think the entire region, even extending up to the Indo-Pacific. So, there's much that we need to attend to, but I think that if we are able to have close

partners and alliances, that we'll always be a very important part of our foreign policy," he added.

Hejč said that with Czechia's geographic position in Europe and its role in past regional conflicts, it was able to enhance and develop its defense and security industry, making it one of the producers of the finest war instruments, arms and ammunition in the world. INQ





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## Business groups ready to increase coco-biodiesel mix to 3%

By JAMES A. LOYOLA

The local coconut and biodiesel industries declared that they are ready to increase production in support of President Ferdinand R. Marcos' plan to increase the mandated biodiesel blend at the pumps to three percent (B3) from the current rate (B2) as part of measures needed to address rising fuel prices.

"It is wonderful news to hear the President's support for B3. The feedstock is available and the capacities for making CME are ready to support the increase in mandate," said United Coconut Association of the Philippines Inc. (UCAP) Chairman Dean A. Lao Jr.

Lao, who is also the president of The Philippine Biodiesel Association and Chemrez Technologies Inc. — a subsidiary of D&L Industries and the country's largest producer of premium coco-biodiesel, noted that, "we expect many benefits to come with a B3 mandate: mileage improvement; lower pollution; import substitution and value adding of coconut oil."

He added, "These benefits will

come with no practical cost to the government, yet have extensive benefits to the country. It's about time the country tap into this valuable resource. Congratulations to our law makers!"

Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said Marcos convened various concerned government agencies to discuss measures that can be taken to help bring down pump prices of both diesel and gasoline.

He said one measure considered by Malacanang was to increase the mandated amount of coco-methyl ester (CME) in diesel to three percent from the current two percent as this can be accommodated by the supply of feedstock which is coconuts or coconut oil.

"Coconut production is 15 billion nuts and an additional one percent blend will only need 2.6 billion nuts," said Lotilla adding that, "the increase in the blend can also drive down the cost of CME because there will be a bigger market for it."

The energy chief also pointed out that, "right now, we expect (price of) pure diesel to be at parity with CME

per liter."

The increase in the biodiesel blend will still have to be approved by the National Biofuels Board which is also headed by Lotilla.

Aside from increasing the biodiesel blend, it was also proposed during the meeting that oil companies be urged to voluntarily increase the ethanol blend in gasoline to 20 percent (E20) from the currently man-

dated 10 percent as this will result in a reduction in gasoline prices by more than one peso.

Lotilla said this is a price mitigation measure because ethanol is now cheaper than gasoline, explaining that, "right now, the price of gasoline without ethanol is at ₱56.89 then it will result in a price differential of around ₱1.28 or up to even ₱1.50 depending on prices."

Local ethanol price per liter is ₱79.49, much higher than imported ethanol which costs ₱41.84 a liter. However, since local ethanol production is enough only for a 10 percent blend (E10), the Philippines can import ethanol for E20 and lower pump prices.

Lotilla said these are based on assumptions that gasoline costs ₱70 per liter while diesel is at ₱66 per liter.



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## BBM reaffirms support for agri-fishery sector

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

**PRESIDENT Marcos Jr.** yesterday reaffirmed his administration's commitment to support and revive the long neglected agri-fishery sector, including sustaining its modernization and reviving some of the reforms and programs initiated during the term of his father and namesake, the late President Ferdinand Marcos.

The President, speaking at the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) in Quezon City,

said the government faces a monumental task to improve the agri-fishery sector as he again called for a whole-of-nation approach to address all the challenges.

Marcos urged FFF to continue supporting efforts of the government to empower the farmers and fishermen, and to keep the organization's legacy of "uplifting all the lives of every Filipino rural worker" alive.

"This is a big job... the government cannot do everything alone, we need your help. We need your diligence, we need your advice

because you directly face the problems in agriculture that we experience now," he said.

He reiterated that the government will do all it can to help both the farmers and fisherfolk have a good harvest that could be sold at an affordable price to the consumers, while at the same time ensure that the farmers and fishermen would have a steady income and means of livelihood to be able to live a good life.

Marcos said the top priorities of his administration, such as enhancing agricultural productiv-

ity to guarantee affordable food supply and lessen the country's dependence on importation, also remains.

Among the efforts of the government to "steer the growth of our fisheries and farming industries with urgency" is through the allocation of a substantial budget to support the modernization of the agri-fisheries sector, he added.

The government allocated P85.88 billion for the modernization of the agri-fisheries industry which is proposed to be increased to P92.4 billion for 2024. The 2023

budget includes the P4.73 billion allocated for large-scale agriculture and fishery mechanization and modernization, which would help reduce post-harvest losses and ensure optimal yield at an affordable cost.

The President said another measure is to strengthen the various agricultural associations and cooperatives so they can provide business and investment opportunities to their beneficiaries and eventually help elevate the standard of living and improve the lives of the farmers and fishermen and

their families.

He added that increasing exportation of the country's agricultural products has been an essential driver in the competitiveness of the economy.

Meanwhile, Marcos lauded FFF for its programs that strengthen the voice of various workers all over the country.

He also recognized FFF's genuine service and constant cooperation with the government that led to the undertaking of various

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### BBM

developments.

"Through your programs and initiatives, you have effectively elevated and empowered the voices of our small farmers, fisherfolk, and rural workers, across the nation. This noble pursuit is the very essence of what my father,

President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., strongly believed in, which I believe I have certainly inherited. This is why it's worth recalling how we championed the cause of the Federation of Free Farmers and expressed his unwavering support for this organization," he said.

The President said he is looking forward to FFF's continued endeavors that will contribute to the vision for a "Bagong Pilipinas" and in achieving food security and nutrition security for the Philippines.

FFF was formed in 1953 as a "peaceful alternative to the Huk

Rebellion" and an "organization of farmers, by farmers and for farmers."

It has a mass base of about 200,000 farmers and fisherfolk, and remains as one of the largest and most reputable organizations of farmers in the country.





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## Rice price surge during holidays not expected, Agri dep't says

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it does not expect rice prices to rise significantly during year-end holidays.

Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita A. Sombilla told reporters on the sidelines of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) anniversary that the DA is working on mitigating further price surges in the staple grain.

She said supply will be ample, "especially with the expected imports coming in."

In the year to date, the Philippines imported 2.71 million metric tons (MT) of rice as of Oct. 12, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

She reiterated that a return to rice price controls is no longer necessary, heading off speculation of rising prices.

"That's really just speculation. We really have to avoid (imposing) price caps again, noting that price controls have "created tensions" in the market.

A farmer's group has called for the reimposition of the P45 per kilogram (kg) price cap on well-milled rice in November, alleging that traders are creating "artificial" conditions to justify high prices.

The government had imposed in August a temporary price cap on regular-milled rice of P41 per kg and on well-milled rice of P45 via Executive Order No. 39.

"We have to have normal market conditions ... especially that we are now harvesting," Ms. Sombilla added.

The DA said last week that it is expecting production of palay, or unmilled rice, to hit 20 million MT this year.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), palay output fell to 19.76 million MT in 2022 from 19.96 million MT a year earlier.

In an address to the FFF, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said the government will push to boost local production to minimize the need to import food.

"I wish to reaffirm one of the top priorities of this administration, which is the enhancement of our agricultural productivity, the guarantee of our food supply, the affordability of our food supply, and our lessening dependence on imports," Mr. Marcos, who is also the Secretary of Agriculture, said.

He added that the government is attempting to mechanize the industry, reduce post-harvest losses and ensure optimal yields.

He said increasing agricultural exports will be "an essential driver in the competitiveness of our economy."

Agricultural exports declined 24.4% to \$1.61 billion in the second quarter, the PSA reported. This accounted for 27.2% of total trade.

Mr. Marcos added that to hit these targets, the administration has proposed more funding for agriculture next year.

"With a substantial budget of P85.88 billion for 2023, and a proposed budget of P92.4 billion pesos for 2024, I am optimistic that we can propel the modernization of our agri-fisheries sector," he said. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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## 'Bumper crop will temper inflation'

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

X @andreasanjuan

**T**HE National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said inflation may start easing this month as it is seeing less pressure on domestic prices because of the availability of certain food items and the "timely" arrival of imports.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the decline in the prices of some commodities in the past few weeks due to the ongoing harvest season should ease inflationary pressures.

"At least for the Philippines, our agriculture people are telling us that there is good production and recovery from the floods, recent floods and so we are likely to have a good harvest and harvest is now ongoing. That could reduce the pressure on domestic prices," Balisacan told reporters on the sidelines of the 2023 Arangkada Philippines Forum held on Wednesday in Pasay City.

"The inflation that we saw in September was a bit on the high side but we hope that inflation in the coming months is much more improved," he added.

Among the main drivers for in-

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## Inflation...

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flation in September 2023 was expensive rice as data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed rice inflation averaged 17.9 percent, the highest in 14 years or since March 2009 when rice inflation reached 22.9 percent.

With the lifting of the price ceiling on rice a few weeks ago, he said, "I think I would be very surprised if the inflation and rice will get a rate that we saw in September because you know, as the harvest season...prices declined a bit in the past couple of weeks."

He added that this should have tempered the pressure for upward prices as retail prices have evidently adjusted "quickly" to the market conditions.

"And so with current availability of supplies and the timely arrival of imports, I think that we should see less of that pressure," the NEDA chief said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. issued Executive Order No. 39 last month in response to the unusual surge in the price of rice last month despite the country's sufficient supply of the food staple. He attributed it to the price manipulation by hoarders and smugglers.

EO 39 imposed a P41 per kilogram (kg) price cap for regular milled rice (RMR) and P45 per kg for well-milled rice (WMR) nationwide. While rice prices have declined in recent weeks, Balisacan said the government is more apprehensive about "longer term trend." "We are hoping that the effects of the El Niño are not as bad...will not be as bad as initially projected."

PSA said inflation averaged 6.1 percent in September 2023. Inflation was at 6.9 percent in September 2022 and 5.3 percent in August 2023.

The inflation rate in September was the highest since May 2023 when inflation was at the same rate. Prior to this, the highest rate was in April at 6.6 percent.



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## PBBM reassures farmers of govt support to boost agri productivity

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. assured Wednesday the government has sufficient resources and support from the private sector to restore the optimum productivity of the agriculture sector after decades of neglect.

In his speech during the 70th founding anniversary of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) in Quezon City, he said a big step towards addressing the issue is by fast tracking the modernization of the sector to boost its productivity.

He noted the Department of Agriculture (DA), which he heads, has allocated P4.73 billion for large-scale agriculture and fishery mechanization and modernization.

The successful implementation of the modernization will help guarantee affordable local food supply and reduce the country's dependence on importation.

The initiative, he said, is expected to be sustained in the proposed P92.4 billion budget of DA for 2024.

"You have my assurance that the government is striving to implement efficient mechanization strategies to reduce post-harvest losses and to ensure the optimal yield at an affordable cost," Marcos told members of the FFF.

He also stressed the important contribution of private stakeholders, such as the FFF in ensuring the success and sustainability of such agricultural reforms of the DA.

"This is the kind of uplifting synergy that we in government anticipate from our private sector partners who ardently champion social justice and actively contribute to our nation's socioeconomic advancement," the President said.

"So, I urge all the members of the FFF to keep the legacy of the founding members, keep it alive, stay true to the mission of uplifting all the lives of every Filipino rural worker," he added.

For his part, FFF Board Chairman Leonardo Q. Montemayor recognized the push of the Marcos administration to improve the well-being of local farmers.

"The strong political will of our incumbent President and Congress ensured the passage of the New Agrarian Emancipation Act and increased budget for agriculture and fisheries," Montemayor said.

Republic Act (RA) No. 11953 or the New Agrarian Emancipation Act (NAEA) provided over 600,000 Agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARB) with debt condonation.

**Samuel P. Medenilla**





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## Czech Republic keen on agri deal with PHL

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

Twitter: @sam\_medenilla

**T**HE Czech Republic will deploy trade missions next year to explore possible partnerships on agriculture and defense with the Philippines.

Czech Republic Ambassador to the Philippines Karel Hejč made the announcement during the presentation of his credentials to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. last Tuesday in Malacañang.

"The opportunities are here. We just need to grab them and I'm pleased to mention that just in the next year, we will start here with the visit of the foreign committee of our parliament on so much important defense and security issues of the regional geopolitics,"

Hejč said.

In preparation for the said missions, he said the Czech Minister of Agriculture will visit the country accompanied with a business delegate within the year.

The Czech diplomat also invited the President to visit their country to attend their trade fair on September next year.

"If you will have some time during your visit in the Czech Republic, it will be also a pleasure to show you some of the industries that are



# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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PHOTO shows one of the 520 tractors delivered by the Czech Ministry of Food and Agriculture to Ghana. [www.mzv.cz](http://www.mzv.cz)

interested in working with your Armed Forces, with your Coast Guard," Hejč said.

The Czech Republic is known for manufacturing agricultural machinery like small tractors

and war material such as fighter jets, airplanes, ships and other equipment.

The President said he welcomes the initiatives since it will help his administration achieve its goal of

enhancing the country's agriculture and defense sector.

"Your country has already been of assistance to us in proposing some vessels that we could use for the securing of our maritime wa-

ters, our maritime territory. And as you must know that this is becoming a very thorny problem that we are facing," Marcos told Hejč.

Last April, Czech Republic Prime Minister Petr Fiala visited the country to discuss defense cooperation, trade and investment, and university-to-university linkages.

Czech Republic is ranked as the country's 39th trading partner with total bilateral trade amounting to \$303.21 million.

With farms covering 44 percent of the country area, the agriculture industry is one of the most important sectors of the Czech economy, according to EIT Food, Europe's leading food innovation initiative.

The country's agricultural production is diversified. Top export products are milk, livestock, grains, sugar and malt. Approximately 13.7 percent of farmland of Czech Republic are used for organic farming.





## PBBM bent on boosting aggie output, reducing dependence on imports

**PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** reaffirmed his commitment on Wednesday to enhance the agricultural productivity of the Philippines as he urged members of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) to enliven the legacy that his father has started for the organization.

Speaking at the 70th Founding Anniversary of the FFF in Quezon City, President Marcos said the administration will continue prioritizing the agricultural sector, which serves as the backbone of the Philippine economy.

"I wish to reaffirm one of the top priorities of this administration, which is the enhancement of our agricultural productivity, the guarantee of our food supply, the affordability of our food supply, and our lessening dependence on importation. This includes pursuing policies that will

support and protect the overall welfare of our farmers, our fishers, our manufacturers, and the consuming public," President Marcos said.

"This administration is steering the growth of our fisheries and farming industries with urgency," he added.

The President said he is optimistic that the administration can propel the country's agri-fisheries sector with the substantial budget of PHP85.88 billion for 2023, and the proposed PHP92.40 billion allotment this year.

The President emphasized that he will also pursue all efforts to strengthen the various associations and cooperatives "so that they can provide business and investment opportunities to their beneficiaries" in the Philippines.

The chief executive, who is also the concurrent

Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), also highlighted that the department has allocated PHP4.73 billion as an investment of the large-scale agriculture and fishery mechanization and modernization.

"This will definitely elevate the standard of living, improve the lives of the farmers and our fishers and that of their families... You have my assurance that the government is striving to implement efficient mechanization strategies to reduce post-harvest losses and to ensure the optimal yield at an affordable cost," President Marcos said.

"Another priority is to increase the exportation of our agricultural products, which has been an essential driver in the competitiveness of our economy," he added.

President Marcos ex-

plained that all of the plans, programs and priorities of the administration are now in the pipeline due to the constant cooperation of the farmers' groups such as the FFF with the government and their genuine service to the farmers and the local communities.

"You have solidified your presence over the past seven decades, and I eagerly anticipate an even deeper collaboration, given our shared commitment. I thus enjoin all the men and women of FFF

to continuously take part in supporting and empowering our farmers and fisherfolk," President Marcos said.

"I look forward to your endeavors that will contribute to our shared vision of 'Bagong Pilipinas' and help us march towards achieving a food- and nutrition-secure Philippines," the chief executive added.



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## NEWS BRIEF

### Agri-fishery sector bubuhayin ni BBM

MATAPOS mapabayaan ng mahabang panahon, bubuhayin at palalakasin ng gobyerno ang sektor ng pangangisda sa bansa.

Ito ang ipinangako ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. matapos pangunahan nitong Miyerkoles ang ika-70 anibersaryo ng Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) sa Quezon City.

Sa kanyang talumpati, sinabi ng pangulo na nasa prayoridad ng kanyang administrasyon ang pagpapaunlad at pagmodernisa sa Philippine Agri-Fishery sector na napabayaan ani-

ya ng ilang dekada.

Hindi aniya ito so-long magagawa ng gobyerno kaya hiniling ng presidente ang tulong at kooperasyon ng FFF at mga magsasaka upang muling sumigla ang agri-fishery sector.

Bubuhusan aniya ng malaking pondo ang agri-fisheries sector para sa modernisasyon at pagpapalakas sa produksyon upang masiguro ang sapat na supply ng pagkain, abot-kayang presyo at higit sa lahat upang hindi na nakadepende ang bansa sa importasyon. (Aileen Taliping)





## COMMENTARY

REX L. NAVARRO

# Science for global food security

**F**rom Oct. 16 to 19, the Philippines hosted the sixth International Rice Congress (IRC) organized by the Los Baños-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA). The IRC brought together international scientists, experts, and decision-makers from the public and private sectors to share science-based solutions to some of the biggest challenges to global rice supply.

The IRC provided a scientific platform for rice-based food system innovators toward shaping a food- and nutrition-secure future. Organized through various scientific themes, the IRC featured events and activities from international, regional, and national research organizations. Private sector groups from global corporations also had a platform to showcase their science innovations, build their networks, and secure partnerships and investments.

In his keynote speech, President Marcos expressed his appreciation for the conduct of the sixth IRC, which he believed would promote the development and use of more science-based rice technologies to promote global food security. In this event, he was handed a sample of the ultra-low glycemic index or GI rice from IRRI. Consuming GI rice leads to improved glycemic control which maintains blood glucose levels within a healthy range—a breakthrough for people with diabetes. The President said he looks forward to seeing more cutting edge innovations come to life through research.

Indeed, science has played a crucial role in ensuring global food security. World population is expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, with demand for food expected to increase by 70 percent. Science can help surmount this challenge by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing post-harvest losses, and improving food safety.

The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was a prime example of how science can help increase agricultural productivity. The Green Revolution introduced new crop varieties that were more resistant to pests and diseases and environmental stresses. These new varieties helped increase crop yield and reduce hunger in many parts of the world.

Science also helped reduce post-harvest losses which occur when crops are damaged or lost during harvesting, transport, storage, or processing. There are, for example, hermetic storage bags that can help prevent insect infestations and fungal growth in stored grains. Food safety is another area where science has made a significant contribution. Foodborne illnesses affect millions of people every year and can be fatal in some cases. Science has helped develop new technologies and practices that can improve food safety. For example, irradiation can be used to kill harmful bacteria in food products.

In the Philippines, the DA is pursuing a Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MRIDP) to address present challenges in food security. The program mobilizes technological, policy, and social innovations in improving agricultural productivity to achieve the government's target of 97 percent rice self-sufficiency by 2028. The MRIDP involves several science-based strategies such as climate change adaptation, balanced soil nutrient management, smart water management, and digital transformation. Pursuing a holistic "triple A" (agricultural productivity, agribusiness, and agro-industrialization) approach, the program also aims to attain economies of scale through farm clustering and consolidation.

On the whole, science has played a pivotal role in ensuring global food security. However, there is still much work to be done given that world population continues to grow, and climate change is expected to pose serious challenges to agriculture. To help address these challenges, there is an urgent need to deploy and scale up science-based innovations through a robust agricultural extension system powered by public-private-people partnership. Therefore, it is quite essential to increase investments and initiate institutional innovations in agriculture research, development, and extension to ensure sustainable food security for all.

Dr. Rex L. Navarro was director for strategic marketing and communication at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, headquartered in Hyderabad, India. He is member of the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines.





## BAI slammed for allowing field trials of ASF vaccines

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

SEN. Cynthia Villar yesterday rebuked the **Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI)** for allowing a supplier to conduct clinical trials of the African Swine Fever (ASF) vaccines in the country, which she said should have been done by the government.

Villar, citing reports of widespread unauthorized sale of the ASF vaccine in the "black market" while the clinical trial was ongoing, said: "The use of non-compliant and poor-quality vaccine will not confer any protection against ASF and may add to the risk of spreading other acute or chronic disease."

Villar made the remarks during the Committee on Agriculture, Food, and Agrarian Reform hearing on proposed measures to develop, protect, and promote the livestock, poultry, and dairy industries.

The senator said she has received information that the BAI has endorsed to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the importation for emergency use of the ASF vaccine from AVAC Vietnam Joint Stock Company through the KPP Powers Commodities Inc., which she said conducted the vaccine clinical trials.

"Dapat hindi supplier ang nagki-clinical trial kundi ang BAI, kasi bias na 'yan. Gusto mo makabenta, eh di syempre aayusin mo 'yan. Ang sinisisi ko ay BAI kung bakit sila pumapayag na ang clinical trial ay gawin ng supplier. Mali 'yun. Dapat government ang gagawa niyan para independent (The supplier should not conduct the clinical trial, but the BAI because that will already be biased. They want to sell [vaccines]

so they will fix the results. BAI is the one to be blamed because it allowed the clinical trial to be done by the supplier. That is wrong. The government should be the one doing the clinical trial so the results will be independent)," Villar said.

Reynaldo Robles, legal counsel and spokesman of KPP Commodities Inc., admitted they supplied 300,000 doses of ASF vaccines to various farms in the country for clinical trial.

"Nag supply lang kami ng vaccines para sa clinical trial, around 300,000 doses (We just supplied the vaccines for clinical trial, around 300,000 doses)," Robles said.

Villar said what KPP Commodities Inc. did was illegal since it was not authorized to hold the clinical trial.

"You are not allowed to do that. You cannot go directly to the farms and conduct clinical trials," she stressed.

AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones, who attended the hearing as a resource person, said the vaccines are not yet "approved" by the government and yet KPP Commodities Inc. already conducted the clinical trial.

Briones said clinical trials should be conducted on a small sample only so when side effects happen, the whole hog industry will not be affected.

BAI assistant director Arlyn Vytiaco told senators that the FDA issued a special import permit for the ASF vaccines.

"The FDA granted the approval for the importation on June 23 only for clinical trial," Vytiaco said.

To this, Sen. Francis Tolentino said the FDA

can be liable for negligence since it allowed the entry of the vaccines.

But a representative of the FDA denied Vytiaco's statement and said that it was the BAI which issued the special import permit.

The FDA said BAI sent a letter to the FDA on December 2, 2022 applying for a vaccine registration in the Philippines.

It added that it was the BAI which requested for the importation of 300,000 ASF vaccines doses, but to its knowledge, only 60 pigs will be subjected to clinical trials.

Villar said she has information that AVAC Vietnam-JSF, developer of the ASF vaccine, has already shipped around 300,000 doses to the country.





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## Sugar farmgate, retail prices still out of sync, planters say

SUGAR PLANTERS said farmgate prices remain weaker-than-expected and out of line with the relative strength of retail prices.

In a statement, the Sugar Council, which includes three planter federations, said farmgate prices last week ranged from P2,501 to P2,760 per bag, below the regulator's target price of P3,000.

The council is composed of the Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc., the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters, Inc., and the Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers, Inc.

Before the milling season started, the **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** had projected a farmgate prices for sugar of P3,000 per 50-kilo bag.

The council said a farmgate price of P2,760 per 50-kilogram bag translates to about P55.2 per kilo at retail.

"But in reality, actual retail price of sugar continues to hover between P80 to P100 per kilo. This leads the Sugar Council to wonder why the farmgate price is low," the council said.

"This also proves that sugar farmers are not (behind the) high retail prices," it added.

The SRA has said that it is looking into possible price manipulation due to "abnormalities" in pricing at the mill, trader, and importer level.

"We strongly support the SRA's move to investigate why sugar prices have been lower than P3,000 per 50-

kilo bag ... We look forward to a comprehensive and expeditious probe, and we eagerly await its results," the council said.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona has described trading as abnormal, with prices fluctuating by P100 or more on a weekly basis. An oversupply of sugar has been blamed for easing farmgate prices.

The SRA delayed the release of 150,000 metric tons of imported sugar via Resolution No. 2023-159, to ensure fairer prices for farmers during milling season.

It added that it will hold on to the reserve sugar in order to build up a two-month buffer stock. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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ALEXSANDAR LITTLEWOLF



## Testing process for Vietnam-made ASF vaccine queried in Senate

A SENIOR Senator queried the Bureau of Animal Industry's (BAI) decision to allow a vaccine supplier to play a role in testing a Vietnam-sourced vaccine designed to protect hogs against African Swine Fever (ASF).

Senator Cynthia A. Villar, who chairs the chamber's agriculture panel, questioned at a joint committee hearing the role of vaccine supplier KPP Powers Commodities, Inc. in the trials.

On June 2, the BAI reported that field trials for the ASF vaccine were successful. Assistant Director Arlyn Vytiaco told the joint panel that the trials were conducted at six farms in Luzon.

BAI Director Paul C. Limson also told the hearing that "our role is to monitor the field trial being conducted. We were not the actual ones conducting (the trial)."

Ms. Villar said that BAI should have been in charge of carrying out the trials, citing the risk of "bias" if an outside party plays a role in the vaccine tests.

Reynaldo Robles, lawyer and spokesman for KPP Powers, said the company supplied the vaccines to independent farms who conducted the trials.

"The one in charge of getting samples is the farm owner (who) gives it to BAI," which was in charge of testing the impact of the vaccine on the hogs, he said.

Food and Drug Administration Director-General Samuel A. Zacate said the agency issued an authorization to import 300,000 doses of the ASF vaccine for field trials, at the BAI's request.

Ms. Villar said non-government entities should play no part in vaccine trials.

Vietnam approved the commercial use of the vaccine only in July. According to media reports, Vietnam is set to ship vaccines to the Philippines this month.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson H. Cainglet said the testing of vaccines should not be rushed.

"We should have learned from our COVID experience," he told the panel, noting that the Philippines waited for a long time to obtain COVID-19 vaccines approved by the World Health Organization.

"It's very simple. This should not have been rushed," Mr. Cainglet said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**





## 'High taxes, customs fees bar investments in agri'

BY RIZAL RAOUL S. REYES

✉@brownindio

**H**IGH taxes, custom duties, and tariff rates and difficulty in procuring licenses and raw materials are among the stumbling blocks to private sector investment in the agriculture sector, according to a former official of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In a speech at a forum organized by the Philippine Stratbase Consultancy Inc., former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said that "the limited private sector investment in Philippine agriculture, which is evident in the small percentage of establishments—only 1 percent engaged in the sector—contributes to consistently low farm productivity."

"Without heavy private sector investment, our agriculture sector will not develop because the resources in the hands of the government are limited. The bulk of resources in this country is in the hands of the private sector. If they are not going to actively participate, I don't see a future in the agriculture industry," Adriano added.

He explained that those needing imported materials as raw materials complain about the high tariff rates of certain commodities.

"For example, you're involved in animal feed milling, the tariff rate is about 35-percent lowest and it can go as high as 40 percent or above compared to Vietnam, which is only about 2 percent," Adriano said.

He added that the high tariffs for raw materials such as corn for feed result to higher cost of livestock in the Philippines.

Adriano noted that the prices of livestock in the country are "exorbitantly high," 73-percent higher than Vietnam and "probably double that of Thailand."

"The main reason for that is the cost of raw materials here are very expensive. They produce corn in Thailand. Vietnam imports corn but at 2 percent," the former DA official added. "The solution is to increase their income or lower the prices by lowering their tariffs so that imported items will come in, raw materials, and then end product will be lower. That is our point of view."

Furthermore, Adriano also

identified difficulty in developing commercial farms, climate change, and the perceived inadequate government support in reducing or mitigating risks particularly in the spread of animal and plant diseases, as among the other main constraints to private sector investments.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. earlier stressed the need to industrialize the agriculture sector amid the rising demand in agriculture products due to population density and the current geopolitical situation in the country.

"Investments in infrastructure and in the capacity of our people—whether in agriculture, education, health, or transportation—are crucial in driving our nation and our economy forward," Marcos has said. "We must put a high premium on investments in agriculture, as it is the key to combating hunger and poverty, and achieving our goal of food sufficiency and security across the country."

Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor B. Savellano said resolving regulatory matters for veterinary feeds, drugs and bio-

logicals like vaccines, is necessary to encourage more investments in the agriculture sector.

"The government wants to have coherent policies and definite answers to the stakeholders in agriculture. By having these, we hope to make them invest more. The regulatory matters have to be aligned to get the private sector to produce more food and ensure food security for the nation," Savellano said during the same forum.

To ensure stability in the food supply chain in the country, Stratbase Group Chief Operating Officer Rupert Paul C. Manhit said he supports lowering the tariff of raw materials in the meantime while continuously providing assistance to local farmers.

Manhit said there is a need to have proper forecasting to create a balance between the importation and local production of agriculture products.

"The local industry stakeholders said they are capable of producing the demand of the Philippine market, as long as there is proper forecasting and enough data research," he added.





## Regulatory 'confusion' puts livestock sector at risk—Villar

BY JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS  
@jearcalas

THE "confusion" over which agency should regulate veterinary products, such as African swine fever (ASF) vaccines, must be ironed out to prevent undue harm to the livestock sector caused by the sale of unregulated items.

Sen. Cynthia A. Villar made this remark during a Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing on Wednesday that looked into the alleged sale of ASF vaccines in the local black market.

In her opening remarks, Villar said the regulatory "confusion" between the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on which agency would regulate veterinary products should be blamed for the supposed entry

and sale of the ASF vaccines.

Citing the Department of Justice, Villar said the BAI does not have any regulatory jurisdiction over veterinary products and establishments. Villar added that this mandate falls under the purview of the FDA.

However, she noted that in the case of the ASF vaccines, it was the BAI that facilitated the trials and even the endorsement for the importation of doses for emergency use.

"Due to the confusion of who is in charge, over the BAI and the FDA over veterinary products, many incoming shipments which are not necessarily ASF or Avian Influenza related drugs ended up seized by the Bureau of Customs, unable to be released until now," she said.

"This bureaucratic issue has disrupted the flow and supply of basic veterinary drugs to the swine, poultry and livestock in-

dustry putting it to unnecessary risk," she added.

Villar said the BAI endorsed to the FDA the authorized importation for emergency use of the ASF vaccines from AVAC Vietnam Joint Stock Co. through KPP Powers Commodities Inc.

She said the ASF vaccines, at the time of their entry in the country, were not yet registered with the FDA, making them "illegal."

"Before a company's products are allowed entry into the Philippine market, each of these products must undergo an individual product registration process by the FDA, to secure a Certificate of Product Registration," she said.

"What happens if I have no Certificate of Product Registration for my products? According to Philippine laws, failure to secure CPR for your products is illegal," Villar said.

Villar claimed that a "small number" of the imported vaccines went to the hands of backyard hog raisers contrary to the rules of the trial that they should be used by commercial farms.

"Buyers of the vaccine were asked to sign a waiver of secrecy on the monitored effect of the vaccine on their animals," she said.

The Philippines continues to experience outbreaks of ASF. Early this month, two Oriental Mindoro towns were placed under state of calamity following the confirmation of an ASF outbreak.

Villar noted that except for the National Capital Region, no region is left unaffected by the ASF. "Since 2019 when it was first discovered in a pig farm in Rizal, the lack of vaccine or effective treatment has made the control of the disease very challenging."





# PH agri sector to gain from digitalization

BY CONRAD M. CARIÑO

**D**IGITALIZATION can become one of the pillars of the Philippine agriculture sector as the adoption of various technologies for growing food is accelerating globally.

This was highlighted during a recent roundtable themed "Adopting technology and innovation to boost agriculture" organized by Digital Pilipinas, which convened thought leaders and key stakeholders to discuss how the latest technological advancements and innovations can enhance agriculture and contribute to the country's overall growth.

For the roundtable, Digital Pilipinas partnered with AgriDOM Solutions Corp., with its external relations manager Buddy Tancontian saying that digitalization can also optimize the utilization of resources to grow food.

"Optimizing farm inputs and maximizing yields are fundamental

for sustainable agriculture, economic prosperity and food security. Farmers must adopt this technology of precision agriculture. With us working together, government agencies, researchers and agriculture organizations, we must continue to support and promote agricultural innovations and initiatives that encourage these resource-efficient and farming practices," he said.

It was also pointed out in the discussion that the global agricultural technology market is expected to surpass \$46.37 billion by 2030 with a compound annual growth rate of 17.3 percent, underscoring the pivotal role that digitalization in sectors

like agriculture plays in economic development.

AgriDOM provides services such as unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and unmanned ground vehicle (UGV) fertilizer and pesticide spreading and spraying; after-sales support and services; mapping, surveying and monitoring; UAV pilot training and license processing; unit sales and registration; and cold chain management.

For his part, Nehemiah Cabalong, information technology officer of the **Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute**, said digitalization can be a core element of agriculture. "This is how we look at integrating digital technology into the agriculture culture: it is not just providing support or as a way for improving the system, but actually, we want digitalization to be a pillar of agriculture. That's how we see digital transformation."

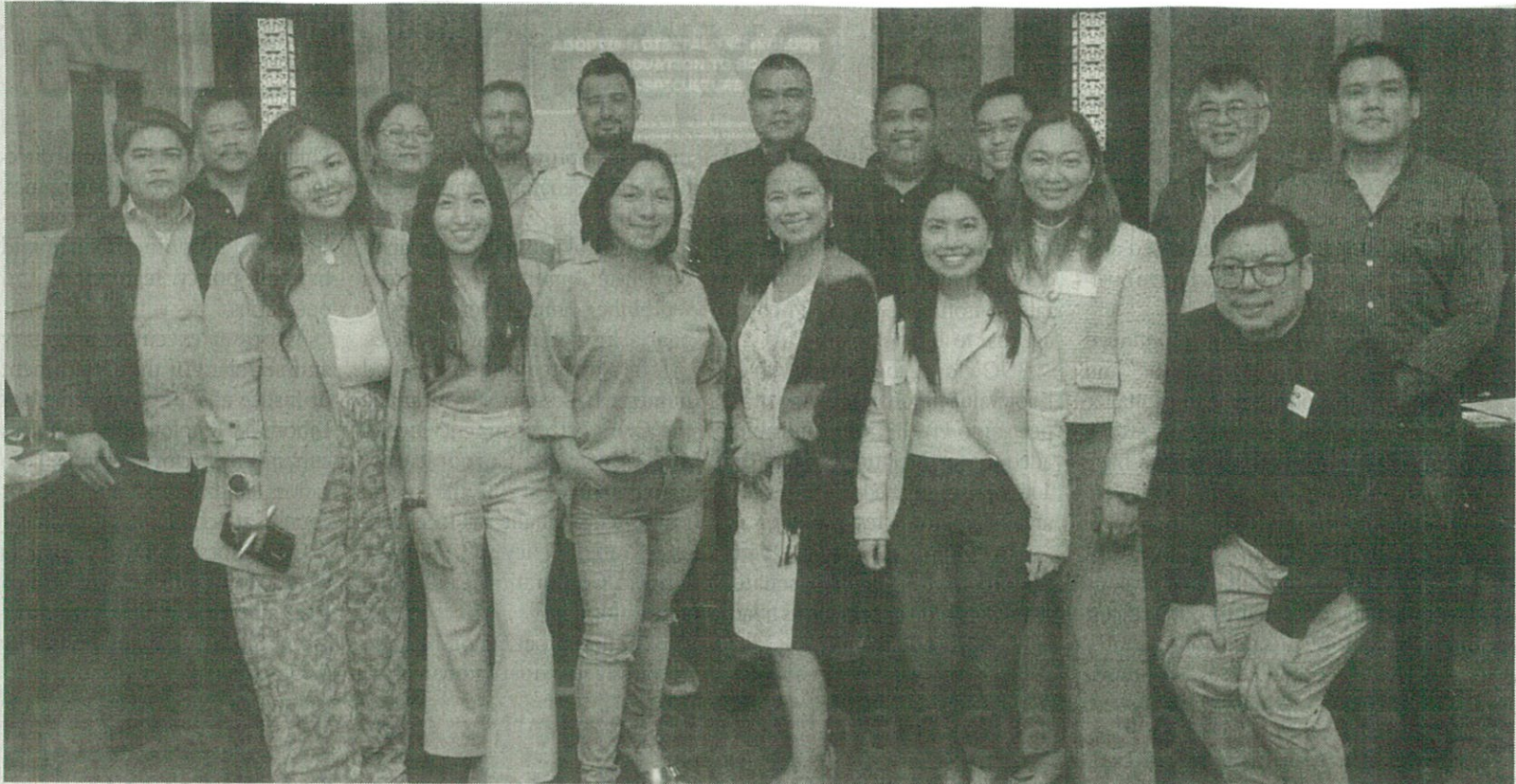
Amor Maclang, Digital Pilipinas convenor, and GeiserMaclang co-

founder, shared how banks and financial technology (fintech) can empower farmers to become entrepreneurs. "Banks and fintechs who support farmers can help farmers see themselves as entrepreneurs. Technology can help them better their productivity and data gathering."

This agritech-focused roundtable discussion is one of the events leading up to the Digital Pilipinas Festival 2, slated from Nov. 20 to 24, 2023, at SM Aura Convention Center and in various co-located venues and innovation hubs nationwide. Digital Pilipinas Festival 2 is happening immediately after the Singapore Fintech Festival, coinciding with the Philippine Startup Week.

Digital Pilipinas is the largest private sector-led movement for creating an innovation and technology ecosystem and is the pioneering ecosystem-builder in Southeast Asia that is actively engaged and synergized in a global digital economy.





■ Photo shows participants of the roundtable event themed 'Adopting Technology and Innovation to Boost Agriculture.' From left (back) are Bayani JM Solana, general services officer, SF Group Companies; Arnold de la Cruz, Sustansiya.ph; Marie Joy Balmaceda de la Cruz, vice president, Sustansiya.ph; Tark Bertelman, local representative, Rikj Zwaan; Ralph Becker, chief executive officer and founder, Urban Greens; Dominador Subang, president, AgriDom; Buddy Tancontian, business development manager, AgriDom Solutions Corp.; Nehemiah Caballong, information technology officer, Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice); Luis Alejandro Tamani, chief information officer, PhilRice; Kristofer Molina, Kubota Philippines. From left (front) are Amor Maclang, Digital Pilipinas convenor; Chams Mancao, Advanced AI Partnership Engagement manager; Thel Zapata, Advanced AI senior business development manager; Mary Joy Calpito, Office of the Deputy Executive Director for Research, PhilRice; May Gudilos, product officer, Pioneer Insurance; Jen Subang, vice president of operations, AgriDom; and Niño Duque, principal business partner in the Philippines for MDEC. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO





## Unlocking Mindanao's vast agricultural potential

**B**ASED on government statistics, Mindanao produces 40 percent of the country's food needs and contributes 30 percent to the national food trade. Also, one-third of Mindanao's land is devoted to agriculture.

And slowly, the vast potential of Mindanao as the country's agricultural powerhouse is being unlocked gradually, especially with the vastly improved peace and order situation on the island.

Figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority as of August showed that Mindanao's agricultural output amounted to P551 billion as of the second quarter of this year, recording an impressive 3.4 percent growth.

Mindanao is also known as one of the top producers of the following commodities: coconut, mango, pineapple, banana, tuna and seaweeds.

Then there is durian, which is gaining a market share in China resulting from the efforts of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in improving trade relations with our Asian neighbor.

The first Philippine Asia Durian Summit will also be held at the SMX Convention Center here from October 25 to 27 in Davao City, with the intention of making the popular Filipino fruit a major export earner. Since the beginning of this year, the Philippines has exported 2,690 metric tons (MT) of fresh durian and 2,752 MT of frozen durian. I believe that Mindanao can double, triple or even quadruple its durian exports in the next two to three years.

For its part, the private sector, through the Go Negosyo-Kanatid Angat Lahat



MOVING  
FORWARD

**WILLIAM  
D. DAR**

Agri Program (Kalap), has been forging mutually beneficial "big brother-small brother" partnerships as far as Mindanao.

One good example is Kenner Foods International Inc., which has operations in Davao involving Indigenous Peoples (IP) farmers. The company specializes in growing, sourcing and trading agricultural commodities such as fermented cacao beans from smallholder farmers.

### Inclusive growth for Mindanao

Mindanao can also involve IPs in making its agriculture sector grow by leaps and bounds.

This is the intention of the Mindanao Inclusive Agriculture Development Project (MIADP), which will be supported financially by the World Bank.

The framework for the MIADP was finalized by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in October 2021 and is being implemented by this current administration.

In May this year, the World Bank approved a funding of \$110 million or about \$6 billion to support the MIADP, which it described as "designed to increase agricultural productivity, resilience and services while also protecting the natural resources of these ancestral domains."

And in July this year, the DA and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) signed an agree-

ment to uplift the lives of some 120,000 IP members in Mindanao as part of the MIADP's implementation.

The MIADP has a social preparation component to capacitate IP organizations during its first year of implementation, and the program will run until 2028.

Twenty-six ancestral domains will be involved in the MIADP, including those in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The IP groups or communities covered by the program are considered part of the country's poorest and most vulnerable or disadvantaged.

The World Bank also cited that large swathes of lands in Mindanao remain unused or are under subsistence cultivation by indigenous communities.

With those facts, Ndiame Diop, World Bank country director for Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, said there should be initiatives to involve IPs to foster inclusive growth in the country actively. He added that the percentage of people living below the poverty line in IP communities is 68 percent.

The NCIP will have an active role in the MIADP, as it will select and endorse IPs and indigenous cultural communities for the project and facilitate processes related to the conduct of the program.

This includes gathering necessary data such as ancestral domain title, certificate of ancestral domain claim, certificate of ancestral land title and other pertinent documents.

Also vital to unlocking the vast potential of Mindanao's agriculture sector is addressing issues like inadequate road infrastructure and lack of access of agricultural producers to services, markets, finance, electricity, internet, and communication services.

So, also included in the MIADP are projects to restore or repair roads and bridges, installation of tram-line systems, and construction of small-scale and solar-powered irrigation systems.

The program also has components to make the farming systems of the IP communities involved resilient to climate change, which is an excellent measure as IPs are among the most vulnerable to the impact of extreme weather conditions.

With the MIADP, Mindanao now has a very inclusive approach to agricultural development, and I pray and hope for the success of the program.

I am very optimistic that Mindanao's agriculture sector, given the proper and adequate support from the government and full cooperation from the private sector and stakeholders, will emerge as the country's powerhouse for food production.

The vastly improved peace and order situation in Mindanao will also help the island region unlock its vast potential in agriculture.

So, let us all rally to make Mindanao an agricultural powerhouse!



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**BAI ginisa ni Villar, bakuna ng Vietnam  
vs ASF ginamit na kahit 'di pa inaaprub**

Ginisa ng ilang senador ang Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) dahil sa pag-i-import at paggamit ng mga bakuna laban sa African Swine Fever mula Vietnam na hindi pa naaaprubahan.

Sa joint hearing ng Senate on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform at Ways and Means, sinita ni Sen. Cynthia Villar ang BAI dahil June 2, 2023 pa lang ay tapos na ang kanilang field trial sa ASF vaccine gayong July 2 lang ito inaaprubahan ng Vietnam.

Bukod dito, nito lang June 23, 2023 na-i-grant ng Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ang special import permit para sa bakuna laban sa ASF kaya naman nagtataka ang senadora papaanong natapos na agad ang trial ng BAI.

Katwiran dito ni BAI Asst. Director Arlene Vytiaco, safety trial ang isinagawa ng BAI at ang efficacy trial ay ginawa sa anim na farms sa Luzon.

Sinabi rin ni Villar sa pagdinig na mayroon siyang impormasyon na ang Vytiaco ay may kamag-anak na supplier ng bakuna na siya namang maring itinatangi ng opisyal.

Subalit giit ni Villar, hindi dapat ginagawa ito lalo pa at nakakahiya na nauna pa ang bansa kesa sa approval ng Vietnam na gumawa ng bakuna.

Dismayado pang sinabi ng senadora na tayo na ang pinaka walang alam sa lahat, malayo umano noong 1950s kung saan ang Pilipinas ang 'the best' pagdating sa agrikultura subalit ngayon tayo ay napag-iwanan na ng lahat. (Gemma Garcia)





## AgriG8 offers green financial solutions

REPRESENTATIVES from a pioneer on agronomy-based risk assessment approach visited the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) to foster green financial solutions and digital innovations."

The delegation from AgriG8 visited the Searca headquarters in Los Banos, Laguna, on October 20 and was led by its chief executive officer, David Chen, and Joshua Tan, chief operating officer. Vanessa Teo, AgriG8 chief technology officer, and Qian Yu Ho, project manager, also formed part of the delegation.

Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said AgriG8 was a participant of the roundtable discussion series on Sustainable Food and Agriculture Systems in Southeast Asia held in April this year and spearheaded by Searca and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Helping rice farmers adopt optimized and sustainable practices, AgriG8 provides a unique farmer-focused experience which provides food producers the ability to increase their yield and nutrient efficiency while enabling them to reduce their carbon footprint and be certified as sustainable.

During the meeting on Friday, Chen provided updates on their initiatives since the roundtable discussion in April and shared AgriG8's collaboration with financial institutions to create green financial products that can help solve rice farmers' habit of loaning from multiple sources. Also, AgriG8 helps farmers get access to affordable climate finance to help them reduce their carbon emissions.



■ David Chen, AgriG8 chief executive officer, discusses CropPal, a gamified approach to collecting farm data, during the meeting with officials of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture on Oct. 20, 2023. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

However, Chen highlighted that farmers are more likely to adopt carbon farming practices if they are incentivized, and pointed out that there are challenges in collecting data on farming practices as farmers are not digitally tool savvy and mainly use their phones for entertainment.

In his response, Gregorio noted that while "farmers are used to storing information in their minds, they have their children who know how to use mobile phones and can assist them."

While Gregorio emphasized the importance of youth engagement in agriculture, Chen in echoing this sentiment presented CropPal, a gamified approach to collecting farm data.

Chen explained that CropPal is an

application that farmers or their children can use to record and optimize farm activities and track the cost and productivity during planting seasons.

"The kids might not want to return to the rice fields, but it doesn't mean they cannot be involved [in agriculture]. They can always help their parents," Chen said.

Also during the meeting, Eric Reynoso, Searca Emerging Innovation for Growth program head, said that extension workers and private institutions have started introducing digital agriculture tools to farmers "but the adoption and acceptability of these tools are not guaranteed."

Informing AgriG8 of Searca's capacity-building activity on carbon

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measurement monitoring, reporting and verification systems in November this year, Reynoso said it is important to train farmers to utilize these digital tools effectively.

He said the first part of the training will include an overview of carbon-wise farming systems and the center's carbon farming and carbon footprint initiatives while the second part will consist of hands-on exercises on familiarizing and using the Carbon Wise Rice Information Management System.

Moreover, Reynoso said that feedback will be gathered regarding the information management system's usability, design and functionality.

**LEANDER C. DOMINGO**





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## Free from politics aid to farmers, solon urges

THE support provided by the government for the local farmers should be insulated from politics as the agriculture sector needs all the help it can get.

This was stressed by AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee, who pointed out that the government is obligated to extend assistance to all Filipino farmers and to do this in a timely manner.

"May mga subsidy at iba-ibang tulong ang gobyerno para sa magsasaka. Sa Kongreso nila-laanan yan ng pondo. Ang prob-

lema, dinaman nagagamit dahil sa dami ng requirements," Lee said in a radio interview.

"Tapos nakakalungkot na malalamannatin namay instances na naiipit ang mga assistance para sa farmers' groups dahil hindi nila kasundo ang mga opisyal; yung support for farmers, dapat insulated from politics yan," Lee, who was in Cebu to deliver a solidarity message for the 1st National Credit Surety Fund Cooperative Congress, added:

*Jester Manalastas*





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## Ayuda ng mga magsasaka pinadidistansya sa politika

HINDI umano dapat pinupulitika ang ayuda na ipinamimigay sa mga magsasaka upang lumaki ang kanilang produksyon.

Sa isang panayam sa radyo, sinabi ni AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee na gumagawa ng programa ang gobyerno at pinopondohan ito ng Kongreso para matulungan ang mga magsasaka na siyang magtatrabaho upang maging sapat ang pagkain sa bansa.

"Tapos nakakalungkot na malalaman natin na may instances na naiipit ang mga assistance para sa farmers' groups dahil hindi nila kasundo ang mga opisyal; yung support for farmers, dapat insulated from politics yan," sabi ni Lee.

"Ang paulit-ulit na sinasabi ko: ang gobyerno dapat enabler. Hindi sya dapat pabigat sa taumbayan. Nandiyan siya para pagaanin ang pasnin ng ating mga kababayan," sabi pa ng solon.

Itinutulak ni Lee ang pagpapasimple ng proseso ng pagkuha ng mga magsasaka ng ayuda sa gobyerno upang mas marami ang makatanggap.  
(Billy Begas)





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## Corn, wheat rise

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn edged higher on Wednesday, with the market recovering from last session's near two-week low while soybeans firmed, although supplies from freshly harvested US crops limited the upside in prices.

Wheat rose after closing lower in the last session on pressure from Russian supplies.

"There is some bargain-buying in corn at these levels," said one Singapore-based trader. "There are a lot of feed grain supplies

in the market, which are going to limit gains."

The most active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) added 0.2 percent to \$4.85 a bushel. Soybeans rose a quarter of a cent to \$13.14-3/4 a bushel and wheat gained 0.3 percent at \$5.82-1/4 a bushel.

A quick harvest pace for US corn and soy is expected to continue until the next round of heavier rains are forecast to move across the Corn Belt later this week. - *Reuters*



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## Project of IFAD, Grow Asia aims to help PHL farmers go digital

**T**HE International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Grow Asia launched the Smallholder Economic Empowerment through Digital Solutions (SEEDS) project which seeks to accelerate the economic development for small-scale farming families and poor rural people in the Philippines through digital solutions.

IFAD and Grow Asia also launched the project in Vietnam and Cambodia last October 23. The initiative has received financial support from the Republic of Korea's Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA).

Southeast Asia is home to 660 million people across 10 countries, and has seen incredible change in recent decades, driven by the rapidly increasing availability and adoption of technology.

While digital technology has brought unprecedented opportunities and sources of income, a persistent digital gap means that small-scale farmers and rural people have been unable to tap into these new opportunities.

IFAD said SEEDS aims to leverage strong partnerships to bring localized solutions that bridge this gap and ensure truly inclusive growth in the region by helping them to access services to modernize their farms and agri-enterprises. It will directly benefit 48,000 people, as well as 30 start-ups and 150 government officials across the three countries at the national or subnational level.

"Around 150 million adults in Southeast Asia still lack access to digital technologies, and rural people are especially left behind. Collaboration is essential to ensure that everyone has access to, and can benefit from, the wide opportunities the new digital economy opens up," said Reehana Raza, regional director, Asia and the Pacific, IFAD. "SEEDS is an initiative that attempts to bring all partners together to enhance digital inclusion, so that technology can be a real force for good."

While the interest in leveraging digital technologies to improve service delivery for small-scale farmers is growing rapidly among the governments of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and response from the private sector is picking up, there are policy and regulatory barriers that limit the uptake of innovations in service provision. Some of these barriers are low digital literacy; a gap in coverage because of poor or limited mobile internet connectivity; and inadequate data privacy policies and regulations.

SEEDS will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the policy and regulatory landscape influencing the uptake of digital innovations in smallholder agriculture, with a focus on policies that promote connectivity in rural and remote regions. The goal is to collaborate with government and private sector partners to enhance the supportive policy and regulatory framework for smallholder digital technologies.

In addition, SEEDS will engage governments, agribusinesses, technology, and support organizations in Cambodia, the Philippines, and Vietnam to identify specific digital initiatives that can be supported. It will also link to existing IFAD country programs and interventions, aligning with already existing digital components and initiatives. It will identify promising digital solutions that have already been developed and piloted through IFAD-funded projects in the three countries to be strengthened and scaled up.

Importantly, the grassroots farmer organizations that work with IFAD-funded projects can allay concerns of small-scale farmers, especially those related to data privacy, and act as the last mile provider of services and training to members.

"To that end, SEEDS will assist these organizations in acquiring digital literacy and mastering the use of relevant digital technologies. This will allow small-scale farmers to be integrated into the evolving digital technology landscape, and to achieve higher farm productivity and incomes."





## Biofuel boom to push US soy meal exports to record high

**S**HIPMENTS of US soybean meal to other countries are expected to climb to a record high next year as more of America's top oilseed crop is crushed for vegetable oil sought after to make green diesel.

America's soy meal, which is created along with oil during crushing of whole

soybeans, is forecast to reach exports of 13.9 million tons in the 2023-24 season, the United States Department of Agriculture said Monday. That would exceed the record 13.2 million tons valued at almost \$7 billion that was hit in the season ended in September.

Higher global demand for US meal comes as drought in Argentina, typically the world's biggest soy meal exporter, has slashed the South American country's supplies available for shipment.

More soybeans are being processed as energy and agriculture companies look to profit from incentives to make cleaner burning fuel made from renewable sources such as farm crops. The production frenzy has led to a rush on soy oil, a key ingredient in green diesel. That in turn is leading to more soy meal, a commodity used to feed livestock. The trend is expected to continue. For the first time earlier this year, more US soy oil was used for biofuel production than food and other domestic uses.

"US exports of soybean meal should continue to expand as



AN employee looks at soybean meal in a grain flat storage terminal. BLOOMBERG

new soybean processing facilities come online over the next several years," said Scott Gerlt, chief economist for the American Soybean Association.

### Nigeria's raw minerals

MEANWHILE, Nigeria plans to tighten rules to reduce the export of raw minerals and encourage the shipment of processed products, a move aimed at creating jobs and boosting the value of its exports.

"You can't take our minerals away without adding value locally," Dele Alake, the minister for solid minerals, said in an interview. "Which means you must start a factory to produce something that is associated with the

mineral that you are taking out."

Africa's largest crude producer is banking on its mineral reserves to provide an alternative source of income as oil output dwindles. The country has lithium, gold, bitumen and iron ore deposits and is intent on emulating nations such as Indonesia in climbing up the commodities value chain and boosting employment. Indonesia's nickel exports surged tenfold in five years after it forced buyers to set up refineries in the country.

Previous Nigerian governments have unsuccessfully tried to revive the mining and quarrying industry. A decade ago, then-President Goodluck Jonathan's administration set a target of

boosting mining's contribution to gross domestic product to 3 percent by 2015. The sector accounted for just 0.2 percent of output last year, according to PwC.

Encouraging foreign companies to refine minerals in-country remains challenging—investors have to contend with an unreliable electricity supply and weak domestic demand, while most minerals are extracted by illegal miners. Northern Nigeria has also long been plagued by insecurity, with armed gangs carrying out mass abductions and killings. The gangs have also displaced lo-

cal communities, making way for illegal mining, Alake said.

Last month, President Bola Tinubu's administration said it was introducing new regulations aimed at cracking down on smuggling and providing better oversight of the industry. It also intends to revoke licenses that aren't used within 18 months.

The government signed an agreement with Australian authorities last month to train locals on the technicalities of the mining industry. That should ensure better regulation and more efficient exploration of the country's solid minerals, Alake said.

The solid-minerals ministry has received "tremendous interest from foreign direct investors," Finance Minister Wale Edun said at a conference in Abuja on Monday. "We expect some of that to come to fruition." *Bloomberg News*